



# Hunger by the Numbers

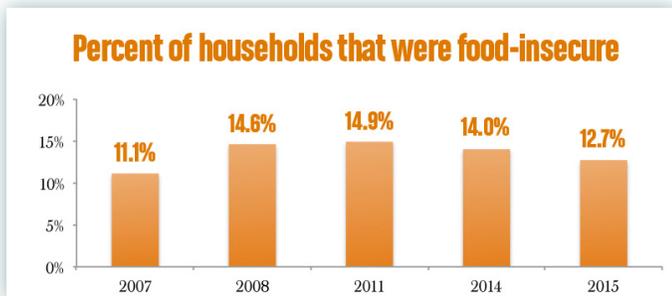
## Progress Made in Reducing Food Insecurity<sup>1</sup>

### Food insecurity in the U.S. declines

In 2015, 12.7 percent of households in the U.S.—42.2 million people<sup>2</sup>—were food-insecure (most recent figures available)—meaning that they were unsure at some point during the year how they would provide for their next meal. These numbers represent the first significant decline in food insecurity since the start of the Great Recession in 2008.

Food insecurity among households increased by more than 30 percent at the start of the recession, jumping from 11.1 percent to 14.6 percent in 2008, and stayed at or above 14 percent through 2014. The decline in food insecurity from 2014 to 2015 means that 1.6 million fewer households and 6 million fewer people were food-insecure last year.<sup>3</sup>

The 2015 rate is still above the pre-recession level. To reach the zero hunger goal by 2030, ending hunger must become a national priority.



### 13 million children live at risk of hunger

The food-insecurity rate for households with children declined by close to 3 percent from 2014 to 2015, but those households continue to be significantly more likely to struggle to put food on the table (16.6 percent) than households with no children (10.9 percent).<sup>4</sup> The overall number of children living in food-insecure households was 13 million in 2015, down from 15.3 million in 2014.<sup>5</sup>

Food-insecurity rates also declined from 35.3 percent to 30.3 percent for single-mother households but remained notably higher than for dual-parent families, which was 10.2 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Parents and other caregivers often shield children from the most severe forms of food insecurity, but children who



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are hungry and at risk of hunger are more likely to struggle in school and have an increased risk for illnesses and weakened immune systems.

### Food insecurity remains higher among African-American and Latino households

From 2014 to 2015, significant progress was made in reducing food insecurity among African-American and Latino households. However, the rates remain disturbingly higher than for white households. In 2015, approximately 1 in 5 African-American (21.5 percent, down from 26.1 percent) and Latino households (19.1 percent, down from 22.4 percent) was food-insecure, compared to 1 in 10 white households (10 percent, down from 10.5 percent).<sup>7</sup>



## Food insecurity varies geographically

Calculated over a three-year average (2013-15), food-insecurity rates varied considerably from state to state, from 8.5 percent in North Dakota to 20.8 percent in Mississippi.<sup>8</sup> Regionally, the highest rates of food insecurity were in the South (13.3 percent) and the Midwest (12.8 percent), followed by the West (12.1 percent) and the Northeast (11.9 percent).<sup>9</sup> Rural areas had the highest food-insecurity rates (15.4 percent), followed by cities (14.1 percent), and the suburbs (10.4 percent).<sup>10</sup>

## The role of federal safety-net programs

Safety-net programs like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), school meals, and the WIC program help millions of families put food on the table every day. These programs are critical in reducing the levels of food insecurity and hunger but are often insufficient to meet a family's nutritional needs. Participation in these programs, especially SNAP and school meals, grew during the recession as the programs are designed to do. As the economy continues to recover, participation rates in these programs have been declining, as expected.

These and other safety-net programs are designed to

meet immediate needs on a temporary basis. They are not designed to replace longer-term solutions such as living-wage jobs, supportive family policies, affordable housing, or other systemic factors affecting hunger, such as eliminating racial discrimination and gender bias.

## A plan to end hunger

The global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), endorsed by the United States in September 2015, create new urgency and lay out a comprehensive plan for ending hunger by 2030. Under the SDGs, the goal to end hunger is connected to many of the other goals that address hunger's root causes, such as ending poverty, ensuring good health and a quality education, providing access to decent work, reducing inequality, achieving gender equity, and confronting climate change.

Bread for the World is working to elect a president and members of Congress who will champion policies to address the underlying causes and achieve the goal of ending hunger.

Learn more about Bread's 2016 election work and Election Platform at [www.bread.org/vote](http://www.bread.org/vote).

## A NOTE ABOUT HOW WE MEASURE HUNGER

Bread for the World uses statistics provided by the U.S. government for domestic hunger figures. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) measures food security on the household level and releases data annually. Food-insecure households are those in which the eating patterns of at least one member are disrupted. Food-insecure households are divided into two subcategories:

• **Low food security** is defined as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods or not knowing the source of the next meal.

• **Very low food security** is defined as disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake through such actions as cutting portion sizes or skipping meals entirely.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alisha Coleman-Jensen, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory, and Anita Singh. Household Food Security in the United States in 2015, ERR-215, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2016. [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err215.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err215.aspx)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Table 1A

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Table 1A

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Table 2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Table 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Table 2

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Table 2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Page 17

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Table 2

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Table 2